



Idaho, Utah spend millions on their capitols

*By JOAN BARRON
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CHEYENNE -- Capitol buildings in Western states were built in roughly the same era and now are in need of costly makeovers.

The Idaho State Capitol was constructed in 1912 and was expanded in 1920. Utah's was dedicated Oct. 10, 1916.

Wyoming's Capitol Building was constructed in three phases in 1888, 1890 and 1917.

Wyoming is starting down the fix-up road with restoration of the Capitol Building skylights over the House and Senate. The big-ticket plan for a substantial historical restoration of the entire building is between \$100 million and \$150 million.

Key legislators visited Utah and Idaho to get an idea of what's in store for Wyoming government.

The state of Utah finished its \$212 million project with rededication ceremonies Jan. 4. The event prompted a weeklong celebration which drew 50,000 Utah residents "back to the people's house," said Allyson Gamble, director of public relations, communications and the visitor service office.

A substantial part of the cost went for seismic isolators installed to stabilize movement of the building in an earthquake.

"It is an amazing engineering feat," Gamble said.

Utah's project was financed by direct legislative appropriations.

Idaho is one year into its \$120 million restoration project. Of the total, less than \$80 million will be spent on the Capitol Building itself, while \$40 million will go to expand the underground wings of the building, said Gary Daniel, Idaho Capitol Commission liaison.

Idaho will use cigarette tax revenues to pay off bonds issued for the project.

The states all have another common problem when embarking on capitol building restoration and renovation projects: Where do you move the evacuees during a project that can take years?

The state of Utah built two new office buildings on the 40-acre site of the Capitol Building located on a hill in Salt Lake City to house the officials and staff members who had to move out.

Legislative offices moved into the new east building, while the governor and staff were housed in the west building.

"We basically moved everybody out for three and a half years while the whole project was completed," Gamble said.

The legislative and research council, which had been in the Capitol Building, will remain in one of the new buildings, which are being remodeled so every legislator can have his or her office, she added.

The state of Idaho was lucky. A county and the federal government provided buildings located in the Idaho Capitol Mall with a combined space of 100,000 square feet. The state invested less than \$5 million to renovate the two buildings for the state people, Daniel said.

The Idaho State Capitol, like Wyoming's, does not have any serious foundation problems, Daniel said.

"What prompted this restoration was the potential a decade from now of not having a useful capitol," Daniels said.

The marble pillars were cracking, and only a tenth of the building was protected from fire.

In 1992, a fire broke out in the attorney general's suite. With no fire suppression or fire escape system, the entire Capitol Building could have burned if the blaze had spread, Daniel said.

Emergency medical personnel had to hike gurneys up the stairs because the elevators were too small.

The final deciding factor was the lack of any hearing room that could hold more than 60 people, Daniel said.

In Wyoming, the tentative plan for construction is to move executive and legislative people out of the Capitol Building into a new state office building to be constructed across the street on the site of the old St. Mary's School. The old school will be demolished after the new St. Mary's School opens in Cheyenne, perhaps next year.